

Presbytery of Abernethy
Local Church Review
Boat of Garten, Duthil and Kincardine
22nd April 2015

Visiting Team

Rev Alison Burnside

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Boat of Garten, Duthil and Kincardine (BDK) – overview

The church buildings are in three villages: Boat of Garten (St Columba's), Carrbridge and the smaller village of Street of Kincardine, where a service is held monthly for ten months of the year. They are in a rural highland setting with all the challenges that come with the territory.

Having worked well together for many years the congregation asked Presbytery to look again at the proposed Presbytery Plan of 2006 as this would have meant splitting the link. In 2009 the Kirk Sessions agreed the way forward was as a Union and in 2012 were linked with Abernethy Parish Church following the retirement of their minister. They describe themselves as enjoying 'an excellent and supportive relationship with each other'.

When their Minister, Rev David Whyte, had to retire earlier than expected due to ill health they were delighted to have Sheila Wallace DCS appointed as their Locum.

Following the appointment of the Rev Donald Walker to the charge in October 2013, Sheila Wallace was appointed as Parish Deacon and Rev Mary Duncanson OLM and MDS to form the Ministry Team for their congregation linked with Abernethy. (It should be noted that Mary, in her role as OLM and MDS also covers Cromdale l/w Dulnain Bridge l/w Grantown-on-Spey).

The congregations are very active and making a positive impact on their communities. One sign as to how the community value the church is that the local AA group meet in St Columba's, hence viewing it as a 'safe' place. We were told that it is 'hard to split church and community' and folk from the community support even if they do not come with donations, grass cutting etc.

They are a friendly, welcoming congregation and have tea and coffee after the services at St Columba's. It is not possible to do this at Duthil as the service there finishes at lunchtime.

They have two active Guilds; regular Soup Lunches (Duthil has its own regular soup lunch, in Boat of Garten it is run as a Community Hall Soup Lunch which is supported by the Ministry Team and members); social events and have long established connections in Duthil with the BB companies who camp in the village each year.

Singing Groups, which aid worship, have been established in St Columba's and Duthil.

There are monthly Congregational Prayer times in St Columba's and Duthil. It is the intention to start up Bible Study groups. Members are encouraged to read their bibles regularly – Bible reading guides are available to encourage this. Pray for Today and Crossreach prayer diaries are also available

The Congregation(s) support Christian Aid, the local Foodbanks, run Traidcraft stalls and support Blythswood and a young man, Bryan in Peru; while, as individuals, members are involved in a number of local charities. Members are also involved in other local groups and activities such as the Golf Club, Bowling Club and Craft Group and hence a link between these groups and the church.

The congregation(s) have a section in the BoG Standard (the village magazine) and information is spread through posters and the Church Family News each Sunday. They distributed the Penny Bibles and Christmas Cards to every home.

Ospreys

As one of their most exciting recent developments this deserves a section on its own!

One of the biggest impacts the church has made on the life of the local community is through Ospreys: Play and Pray, a group set up for families. What makes this so exciting is that a group of non-church mums approached Judith Walker and asked if the church could provide something for their children – exciting as although the mums did not go to the church on a Sunday they felt there was a place in it for them and their children.

It meets in the Church Hall on the first Monday of the Month from 3:30pm to 4:30pm. It is roughly for 3 to 8 year olds and mums and dads are welcome too. There are games, crafts, baking, Christian songs and Bible stories. Children from this group have planned for and been involved in some of the services eg Palm Sunday. As we were told 'having children in church has transformed the church'.

Children also enjoy the Christingle services which are very popular and the Guild Treasure Hunt (Duthil) with activities in the hall after the hunt is over.

The congregation have begun to dream of a children and family worker to build on this work.

Meeting with the Ministerial Team

The visiting team (The Team) met with Rev Mary Duncanson (OLM and MDS), Mrs Sheila Wallace (DCS) and Rev Donald Walker in St Columba's Guild Room prior to meeting with the Kirk Session.

(Please note that because there was overlap in the answers given to the questions asked before the meeting with Abernethy Parish Kirk Session, some of the findings for this report were given then and not at the meeting prior to the one with Boat of Garten, Duthil and Kincardine Kirk Session.) The clergy all feel supported by the Kirk Session and congregation(s).

The Ministerial Team meet together regularly to discuss, plan and pray together.

Meeting with Donald Walker (Parish Minister)

Donald was inducted to the charge of Abernethy l/w Boat of Garten, Duthil and Kincardine in October 2013. He says he is finding it both a 'joy and a challenge'.

Donald values and appreciates the work that Sheila and Mary do. He is aware that both of them do far more hours than their given hours which concerns him. He feels he is doing as much as he would like given the workload involved with the two Parishes. However this did not concern the Team as we feel he is indeed giving his congregations as much as he can and we would commend him for this.

It was noted that Donald is currently acting as Interim Moderator for the linked charge of Alvie and Insh linked with Rothiemurchus and Aviemore which adds to his workload.

Donald goes into the schools regularly, is invited to assemblies and has been into some classes. The schools come to the churches for end of term assemblies. He feels he has a good relationship with the Head Teachers.

He is used to working with bible study groups and groups such as Alpha, Christianity Explored and would like to develop groups where people would feel welcome and able to explore their faith and increase their self-belief and confidence in their faith.

Donald stressed that he would not be able to do all that he does without the support of his wife Judith. They are both happy with the condition of the Manse.

Looking forward to working with the Teams under the Unitary Constitution he says: It's exciting.

Meeting with Sheila Wallace (Deacon)

Sheila was employed by BDK as Locum during their vacancy. A fresh 3 year contract, jointly funded by Abernethy and BDK, from their own resources, was made with her for 21 hours per week as Parish Deacon from the time Donald arrived as Minister.

She had become aware that she was working more than her 21 hours and that this was affecting her health and that by rushing around trying to do too much she was not able to give her pastoral work as much time as she felt she should. In conjunction with the Minister and the Session Clerks, she has now adjusted her workload and cut down her hours trying to adhere to the 21 hours in her contract. Rather than spread herself thinly and go to everything that was on in all the parishes she now tries to concentrate on pastoral work and the church services, though she does other bits and pieces as well.

She has been grateful that Donald has been very gracious during the time of transition.

Meeting with Mary Duncanson (OLM)

Mary is employed as an MDS for 12 hours per week to which she has added the 10 hours she gives Presbytery as an OLM giving 22 hours per week which is divided between the charges of Abernethy I/w Boat of Garten, Duthil and Kincardine, and Cromdale and Advie I/w Dulnain Bridge I/w Grantown-on-Spey.

She sometimes has logistic problems with service times but given the number of charges she is involved with it is hard to see how this can be remedied.

She feels that she has been doing too much, more than her 22 hours and has asked to have one Sunday off every two months. That she has been doing far more than she should was echoed by Donald.

She was with the congregation for 6 months as part of her Readership training. She feels she has the support of the Ministerial Team and the Congregation and says with conviction that she 'loves her job'.

The Kirk Session stated that they appreciate all that Mary and Sheila do.

They worry about what will happen across the linkage when Mary retires and Sheila's contract comes to an end and how this will affect Donald's ministry.

Kirk Session

When the Team met with the Kirk Session they were hoping to move to the Unitary Constitution. At the Presbytery meeting of 5th May 2015 this was approved.

There are 6 male Elders and 9 female Elders and, at the time of the visit, there were 2 men and 6 women serving on the Congregational Board. They will think about whether or not they need more Elders as they move to the Unitary Constitution.

The Church had had a Development Group to take forward short, medium and long term plans. In light of the proposed move to the Unitary Constitution this group was no longer needed. When the Team met with the Kirk Session a lot of work had gone in to preparing for the move to the Unitary Constitution.

As with many congregations there is a concern that the faithful members continue to age and few younger ones are joining. Therefore the Kirk Session would like to do more outreach into the communities, and this has begun – for example, through Ospreys.

There was a feeling that they needed to work on communication and were committed to finding ways to do this.

Worship

There is a Worship Group who are all not quite confident yet to lead worship but who are being encouraged. Donald is good at drawing out people's strengths and so there is a feeling that the Worship Group will soon feel able. Donald is encouraging them to see that involving more people is more in keeping with the New Testament.

The Team were excited by the description of worship being 'traditionally Church of Scotland, with an adventurous edge'. With having three people on the ministerial team they have three different personalities with slightly different styles. They feel they are friendlier and the atmosphere is more relaxed, and there is often an engaging style to the worship with more

congregational interaction and spontaneity. By setting up Singing Groups they are now able to have 'new' hymns in worship. Audio visual equipment is also used occasionally.

Midweek Prayer Times are held once a month in St Columba's and Duthil and last about 35 to 40 minutes.

There are people on the fringes of the church and they would like to encourage them to draw nearer.

On Easter Sunday they had an early morning service at Loch Garten with over 100 people attending from all the churches in the charge, local communities and visitors.

They are looking to setting up, initially, a Home Group Bible study. They feel people would be encouraged to explore their faith in a place where they feel welcome and comfortable.

Safeguarding

The congregation(s) have a Safeguarding Coordinator.

The Team were concerned prior to the visit that the Kirk Session had not appointed two or more people to work with the Safeguarding Coordinator in operating a Safeguarding Panel as instructed by the 2009 General Assembly and that congregation were not being updated on the latest safeguarding policies and procedures. This could be important if they feel concerned about a child(ren) who attend their Ospreys.

We understand that this has now been rectified.

Finance

The congregations have always funded Sheila's post (now for more than 3 years) and the financial reserves are running low. The Elders urgently request that Presbytery review the most recent Presbytery Plan, in light of Mary's intention to retire and the congregations' inability to continue to fund Sheila's post.

In light of the concern about the finances, especially after some major repairs, a Stewardship Campaign was launched. It is early days yet and the outcome has yet to be determined.

Buildings

In the light of the forecast over expenditure a freeze was placed on non-essential repairs.

A professional survey of Duthil Church and Hall was undertaken in 2014 and the Presbyterial one of St Columba's Church and Hall in 2013. The major outstanding item is the refurbishment of a number of the stained glass windows in St Columba's and a window needs attention in Kincardine. Duthil has an ongoing maintenance programme.

Additional Note:

The Kirk Session were deeply concerned that they, and every other Kirk Session, had not been able to be involved in the decision re Gay Clergy that will be taken to the General Assembly 2015 having gone to Presbyteries under the Barrier Act. It was explained that the procedure was regulated by church law. However, having already been in possession of the Blue Book, Alison explained that there were safeguards being put in place that would ensure a congregation had control from the start of their vacancy when decisions would be made ensuring that they would not have a minister that they felt uncomfortable with or felt was incompatible with biblical teaching.

Recommendations

The Kirk Session should continue to develop and encourage those in the Worship Group until they reach a point where they feel competent enough to lead worship and, particularly in the light of uncertain future concerning ministerial provision, encourage others to think about how they could add to the group.

The Kirk Session should continue to work on finding ways of improving communication particularly with the wider community.

The congregation should continue addressing finance issues to ensure that they are able to continue with the day to day running of the congregations, move forward in their plans for mission and outreach, and ensure their buildings are in a good state of repair where the works needed, as stated above, have been completed.

The Kirk Session should continue to support Donald, Sheila and Mary uphold them in prayer as Donald, Sheila and Mary value the support given.

The congregation should continue to seek ways of reaching out to the people of their parish.

Affirmation of Presbytery

Presbytery commits to reviewing the Ministerial Team provision in light of the decision of Mary Duncanson (OLM and MDS) to retire; the knowledge that Sheila's contract will come to an end in not much more and a year's time; and the understanding that the congregations will probably not be financially able to sustain such positions themselves.

Presbytery encourages the congregation to explore the possibility of a Children and Family worker as they continue to establish links with and develop work with families in their Parish.

Presbytery commends those in the Worship Group for being prepared to try something others would find nerve-wracking, and encourages them to believe that they are doing what God wants them to do and that He is with them as they prepare and eventually lead.

Presbytery commend the congregation(s) for coming through the challenges that they have and will support them as much as possible as they move forward building on what they have done in the past.

Presbytery recognises, commends and supports the hard work of the Minister, the Ministerial Team and the Kirk Session, and encourages them to continue worshipping together, supporting each other and being active in their Parish as they live out the greatest commandment to 'love one another' while making their own faith journey.

Alison Burnside

Visiting Team Convenor